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lost and she takes her neighbors', II. that she knows her neighbors steal hers, III. that the chickens which she stole consorted with her own when young and ate her food, IV. that the neighboring chickens damage her garden. Of these the first and third are pronounced insufficient, while the second and fourth justify her.*

HENRY CHARLES LEA.

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THE REALITY OF THE GENERAL WILL.

"There is often a great difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter looks only to the common interest; the former looks to private interest, and is nothing but a sum of individual wills; but take away from these same wills the plus, and minus, that cancel one another, and there remains, as the sum of the differences, the general will." "Sovereignty is only the exercise of the general will." †

THIS celebrated antithesis, the statement of which I have translated from Rousseau's own words, has the effect of setting a problem to which Rousseau himself scarcely finds an answer. The problem is emphasized by the various reasons and indications which make it difficult to believe that the action of any community is a mere sum of the effects of wholly independent causes operating on a number of separate individual minds. No doubt, the action of a community sometimes is, and often appears to be, the sum of effects of such independent causes. One man gives a certain vote because he hates Mr. A.; another man gives the same vote because he thinks Mr. B. will do something for his trade; and a third gives the same vote because of some one out of a thousand possible social reforms which he thinks the man he is voting for will help or will hinder, as the case may be. Now, assuming these causes to be independent of one another, the direction in which they will sum up is a question of chance. Of course it is determined by causation, but it is not determined by any

* Bertolotti Sylloge Casuum I. 147 (Romæ, 1893).

† Rousseau, "Contrat Social," Book II., chap. i. and chap. iii.

general cause, corresponding to a general element in the result which takes place. As related to the separate causes in operation, the general character of that result is a coincidence or matter of chance.

And this is, in fact, how Rousseau seems to regard it, and he therefore suggests what is practically, I should imagine, just the wrong method for eliminating private interest and getting at the general will. Let the citizens all vote as independent units, not organizing themselves in groups or adjusting their views by private communication, and then, he thinks, as I understand him, the general interest will assert itself, as any general cause does, in the elimination of chance, among a great number of counteracting independent causes; that is, as he says, the independent causes, if present in sufficient numbers, may be expected to cancel, and the general cause will have a visible effect in deciding the question. If private interests are equally balanced, the public interest will affect some minds on both sides enough to turn the scale. This element of regard to the public interest is what he calls the general will, as distinct from the will of all.

I do not think that this view is false; but it is not adequate to the action of a very complex society with elaborate constructive tasks before it. It is rather adapted to a plebiscite on a single question, in which the general will is represented by a conscious though feeble inclination to what is admittedly the public interest. The discouragement of discussion and of organization in groups, which he insists on in order to keep the chances fair, *i.e.*, to keep all the private interests independent of one another, would make all complicated legislation impossible, and is quite incompatible with the method which I shall maintain, that necessity prescribes for the formation of the general will. He so far admits this, that the ideal legislator is for him a person outside the community, who interprets the general will into a system of laws.

What we have got then, so far, is a problem or a paradox: the idea of a will whose sole aim is the common interest, although it can exist as a will only in the minds of the human individuals who make up the community, and all of whom

are for the most part occupied with their own individual interests. There is no social brain other than and separate from the brain of individuals, and because we seldom face this difficulty fairly, our great modern gospel, that society is an organism, is becoming a little stale before it has rendered us the one service which it might perhaps be able to render; that is, to make us ask ourselves in what properties or relations of individuals in society there resides anything corresponding on behalf of society to the brain or mind of each separate individual. We know that many not contemptible people speak of the individual members of any community as mostly fools, and say that the wise and those who are in the right are always in the minority, and that the ordinary man picks up his opinions out of a newspaper, and adjusts them by conversation with two or three other persons no better informed than himself. The expressions, more or less in this sense, of so eminent a writer as Mr. Bryce, in his discussion of Public Opinion in the third volume of the work on the "American Commonwealth," were what I had chiefly in my mind when I resolved to try and examine this paradox, which in that discussion Mr. Bryce fully recognizes. No candid man can altogether, I think, deny the judgments to which I am referring, so far as they deal with the general capacity for intellectual processes in unfamiliar matter. Mr. Bryce indeed tries to blunt the paradox by pointing out that the so-called educated classes are *not* especially fitted, by the training which has hitherto been customary, for dealing with important practical questions; but this does not help us to see how the bulk of the community *are* able and willing to deal rightly with such questions in the common interest. If the majority of separate individuals are, on any question immediately put before them, more likely to miss the common interest than to hit it, both from blindness and from selfishness, which cannot practically be distinguished, why does not society come to grief? Aristotle says that all the citizens taken together may have more wisdom than any one. Is there any meaning in this?

Is it true that the intelligent pursuit by the individual of his

private interests necessarily in the system of things conduces to the preservation of the community? Not if we mean by his private interests merely certain aims which are definitely before his mind, which he might tell you are the ruling objects of his life. On the other hand, if we say that the pursuit of his private interests *as*, on the whole, he pursues them, conduces to the preservation of the community, that is pretty much a tautology.

What necessity is there that this mode of action and judgment should have in it any general reference whatever? When and why is the general will a reality within individual wills?

I have taken some time to state the paradox, because I think that the facts which it indicates are of extreme importance, even if the explanation offered is inadequate. I will now attempt an explanation, borrowing in some degree the ideas of modern psychology.

By an individual will I mean a human mind considered as a machine, of which the parts are ideas or groups of ideas, all tending to pass into action but liable to be counteracted or again to be reinforced by each other. The groups of ideas are connected with each other by associations of all degrees of intimacy, but each is for the most part capable of being awakened into action by the appropriate stimulus without awakening more remotely associated groups, and the will, for the time being, consists of those ideas which are guiding attention and action. The ideas are not thrown together anyhow, but are more or less organized; some being of a nature which enables them to serve as a clue or plan in which others find their places, and in a sense every group of ideas might be called a single idea, and all that there is in the mind has the character of a single idea,—that is to say, all its parts are connected in various degrees, and more or less subordinated to some dominant ideas which, as a rule, dictate the place and importance of the others. We know what a ruling idea is: it is one that has got the control of the mind, and subordinates all the other ideas to itself. This mental system, with its dominant ideas in relation to external action, is the individual will.

Now, at first sight all these individual wills, or minds in action, are separate machines, locked up in separate boxes, each with its indicator outside, and the response which each of them will make to a stimulus from without is determined by its own structure, which is again determined by its own private history. If we go no farther than this we seem not to get any hint of a general will, but only a sum of individual wills, which need not have any reference to each other's ideas.

But we can perhaps go behind this. The individual will is shaped by its dominant ideas. What, on the whole, determines which ideas get the upper hand? The answer seems to be that the ideas which tend to be victorious are those distinguished by logical capacity; because they are especially able to marshal the content of consciousness in a way suitable to themselves, checking and defeating the ideas that cannot be brought into their system, and reinforcing themselves by those that can. All practical action tends to give the victory to such ideas as these, while modifying and extending them. Any suggestion which enables you to deal with matter that you have to arrange is maintained in your mind and reinforced by the successful action to which it leads, and receives new content, which it embodies in itself, from the combinations which arise in carrying it out. Other suggestions, that "would not do," as we say, are driven out and disappear. Still, all this is a play of ideas within the individual mind locked up in its separate box.

But now, does the quality which makes certain ideas dominant in one individual mind insure their having any relation to the ideas which are dominant in other individual minds? Under certain conditions, clearly this is the case: These conditions are, in brief, community of life and of experience. Ideas do not spring from nowhere; they are the inside which reflects the material action and real conditions that form the outside. So that the common life shared by the members of a community involves a common element in their ideas, not merely in their notions of things about them, though this is very important, but more especially in the dominant or

organizing ideas which rule their minds. For the matter which is before their minds to be organized consists in great measure of connections between persons, and life simply cannot go on unless the organizing ideas in different people's minds with reference to these connections correspond definitely to one another. This is, of course, a truism, except that it is not always driven home with reference to the actual shape and content which it implies in individual minds.

It may be said this only means that different persons' minds in the same country have a good deal in common; it does not mean that they participate in any conception of a common interest, but merely that they are influenced in the same way by the same appeal, with a certain general result, which is no more *in* each of them than the waving of a field of corn before the wind is in each separate stalk of corn. Well, this comparison is just for some cases,—for the case of a mob, for instance, when they act as one man, under the influence of an identical sentiment of anger or cupidity. This is an irrational form of the general will, as a burst of feeling is of the individual will; but it is definitely general in so far as it is owing to the operation of the same sentiment in all the minds at once.

But there are stronger cases than this. Just as the material working of any industry or institution is not complete in a single person, but consists in corresponding though different actions of different persons, so it is with the dominating ideas which in different individual minds represent this working. Therefore, if we could see these minds, which are locked up in boxes tolerably like each other on the outside, we should perceive that each of them bears quite a definite reference to the others outside itself; in short, it is not really a complete machine, as the body, though to some degree marked and moulded by its habitual occupation, appears to be, but is only part of a machine, of which the other parts are the minds of other persons with whom the first is in connection. The proof of this lies in the fact that external life is organized, which organization again consists in the fact that the dominant ideas of the persons who participate in this life consti-

tute, when taken together, a machine whose parts play into one another.

Then we may identify the general will of any community with the whole working system of dominant ideas which determines the places and functions of its members, and of the community as a whole among other communities. The system is never quite harmonious; readjustment is always going on, but the direction of this readjustment is determined by the forces in collision together with the other forces of the machine. Both the more important workings of the machine, and especially the direction of its readjustment, are the most familiar *expression* of the general will. But the general will itself is the whole assemblage of individual minds, considered as a working system, with parts corresponding to one another, and producing as a result a certain life for all these parts themselves.

Such a conception seems illusory, because it is hard to define exactly where the thing which it describes begins and ends; but really in modern philosophy nothing can be parted sharply at the point of transition; it is enough if the central phenomena in each region are clear and distinguishable.

I will mark it off by three negatives.

The general will cannot be identified with the decision of a community by vote upon any single issue. Every such decision is an expression or consequence of the general will, but needs interpretation in order to say what direction of movement it really represents. In short, the general will is a system in motion, and cannot be expressed in a single proposition. And no system of voting can secure its expression, because it does not exist in a form that can be embodied in a vote.

Again, the general will is not identical with public opinion, considered as a set of judgments which form the currently expressed reflection upon the course of affairs. It may include these current notions or part of them, but it certainly includes much more, because the ideas that dominate the will do not always appear in reflection, or at least not with the importance

which they have in life. The general will is more a system of wills than a system of reflections, and appears in action quite as much as in discussion.

Again, it is not merely the *de facto* tendency of all that is done by members of the community, though it is much more like this than like a vote or a set of opinions. It *is* to a great extent a *de facto* tendency, but only in so far as this tendency reveals active ideas with reference to the connection of persons or groups of persons. Other tendencies than these do not directly concern the organization of life, and therefore do not directly form part of the active scheme of society.

Take two examples from opposite extremes in mental development. An agricultural laborer thinks, I suppose, chiefly about making his living and supporting his family. His choice of where he will work and what kind of farm work pays him best does not greatly affect the nature of his connection with other people, being all within the same general scheme. But, although he does not reflect—or even if he does not reflect—on this general scheme, yet it is represented in the shape of his mind; that is, in his customary active ideas, and in their limitations. Now, these active ideas of his in their general character—*i.e.*, the general character and limits of what he is prepared to do and to expect with reference to other persons,—this is the factor of the general will operative in his mind. It is acted on by his daily life, and rests upon that life; but it is rather the outline or scheme of that life than the every-day details of it.

A dramatic poet, again, will exercise his conscious choice about his subjects and his form of writing, and so forth. All this makes no direct difference to other people, and they cannot directly help him in it. Society cannot write a play. But if, for example, a school of really great dramatists were to arise in England to-day, the result might be to remould the working ideas in their own and other minds. The theatre would force itself, as a matter to be taken account of, into the mental systems of individuals, and in doing so would modify their dominant notions as to the place of art in national life, and so there would be a tendency of one kind or another which

would enter into the active scheme or logical machine of social relations as a factor in the general will.

After these three negatives, I will say affirmatively that we may identify the general will with public opinion in a pregnant sense; not as consisting in the things said in the newspapers, but as the *actual* tendency of the whole process in which the necessary organizing ideas of all individual minds in the community are factors.

The corollary from these suggestions, which is chiefly of interest to us, concerns the process of formation of the general will, or of public opinion in this pregnant sense.

It is not essentially superficial nor sentimental. It is essentially logical.

What is the root of the whole matter? It is nothing less than the correspondence with each other of the shapes taken by separate minds, each under the stress of its particular experience, giving the victory to those ideas which are able to grapple with the matter pressed upon it. If the external life of the community works as a system, then this internal life must work as a system also; the one reflects the other.

Therefore, though it seems, as we said, as though most people are wrong when they express their opinions, and as if they pick them up from hearsay or from newspapers by sheer chance, this is to a great extent a *mere* appearance. Every person who does anything which is a necessary function in the community has in virtue of this function, which is mirrored in the shape of his leading active ideas, a definite position in the logical system of the community. So far as his mind reflects the real necessities of his active life he is on solid ground, and his will is so far a factor in the general will, because his life—which is his will seen from the outside—is a factor in the general life. If we all understood our own active ideas completely and rightly in relation to those of others, then we should have the whole general will in our explicit consciousness.

But, as it is, no individual ever can have this, for two principal reasons:

First, we are never thoroughly aware even of our own prac-

tical ideas. The will is a great mass of associated ideas guiding attention and action, of which very different portions come into play in different contexts, and our description of which in general language, however honest we are, is not infallibly true, but, just like our description of any complicated phenomenon outside us, depends on our skill, patience, and truthfulness. Nothing is commoner than to succeed in telling a man something about his own conscious action which he really did not know till you told him. Especially, the nature of practical ideas consists very much in their limitations, and of these, except by intellectual self-criticism, we are not aware. A man may honestly believe that he has no prejudice against perfect social equality, and a short cross-examination will often show him that he has a strong prejudice of the kind. We are not conscious, either of all the influences active in our will, or of its limitations.

Secondly, no one, not the greatest statesman or historical philosopher, has in his mind, even in theory, much less as a practical object, the real development in which his community is moving. In modern philosophy the contrast between man and nature is apt to be far too sharply drawn at this point, as if the whole moral world was consciously constructed by man. In very great men the relation of conscious purpose to historical result seems sometimes—as in Cavour, for example—to be considerable; but on the whole we are to the structure of legal, political, and economic organization like coral insects to a coral reef. All these things, and the body of science itself, are on one side natural products—that is to say, that, although conscious purpose works in them, the effect it produces is always part of a system which is more than any particular agent intended. The process always needs the future to explain its real tendency.

Thus the general will is only in part self-conscious, and in as far as an attempt is made to formulate it in judgments it seems to become fallible. For then it ceases to be fact, and becomes interpretation of fact.

Still, it is important, in thinking of the formation of the general will with a view to its interpretation, to remember

what kind of facts it consists of. The solid basis for every one is in his own practical will, determined by the real necessities of his life in discharging a function in society. The process of interpretation and rationalization of this will is then technically a process of criticism, that is to say, of adjusting the bearings of our whole view of life to the solid data of our own necessary working ideas in relation to those of others.

Now, this process again is not entirely conscious. It has two forms,—practical organization and reflective discussion. In practical organization, ideas adjust themselves to each other without consciousness of anything beyond an immediate daily purpose, and it is only after a long interval that people wake up and find perhaps the entire relations of classes and of industry changed as it were in their sleep. This practical organization is probably the most important phase in the formation of the general will. Of course it includes conflict within the law. And the second phase, discussion, if it is to be of any service, ought really to be the same thing in a reflective form—that is, contrivance, organization, ascertainment by criticism of solid data, consisting in reasonable necessities, and their adjustment in a working system, such as to satisfy them all.

Now, of course these two processes pass into one another, and will more and more do so. And the two together really make up a very great part of life, so far as the persons concerned participate in a common experience. Every person is thus always being moulded into a logical unit much more than he is aware, and the casual opinions which he expresses do not really represent the content of his will or the process by which it is formed.

We must modify the theory to admit of our belonging to more than one community. The different ideas which rule us in different relations allow easily of this. The communities to which we belong are now like a nest of boxes inside one another; but we cannot effectively share the general will of any community with which we have no common life and experience. Whether humanity can yet be said to have a general will is at least doubtful.

I do not think I am trenching on practical politics if I illus-

trate the importance which I attach to the unconscious or semi-conscious logic of life in contact with our neighbors by a reference to Mr. Hare's election scheme, the essence of which is that the constituency is de-localized. I once spoke of this to the late Professor Green, being myself much fascinated by its ingenuity, and he replied, "I rather despise all those schemes for detaching people from their locality." Mill, on the other hand, in the "Autobiography" speaks of it, we remember, as a real triumph of political contrivance.

What I desire to point out is merely that, for good or evil, I think men would judge quite differently, acting under such a scheme, from the way in which they judge when they act in their locality. Everything depends on the context to which one's views and action have to be adjusted. If you have to fight out a set of opinions in practice and in discussion among your neighbors, that is quite a different process from letting the returning officer look out a few thousand people in Great Britain who happen to agree with you on a single point. In the one case, your whole life is really an argument, both unconscious and conscious, with reference to the general working scheme of society. In the other case you simply pronounce a single casual reflective judgment. It appears to me an apt illustration of the general or organic will as contrasted with the will of all as a number of units.

I do not say that locality is a necessary condition. I only say that it is a simple case of the necessary condition, of which there may be other cases.

Well, then, how does all this apply to matters of very special information either about distant countries or about the technique of management in difficult concerns, which the community as a whole undertakes? Here, no doubt, Mr. Bryce's account becomes much more true. We know what sort of life we want for ourselves and others, but we are not generally competent to construct it *in unfamiliar relations*. In our own life, as I have tried to explain, the thing works itself out by a self-adjusting process, because, whether we *know* what is wanted or not, we ourselves *are* the want, and behave accordingly.

The result is, then, that the general will is a process continuously emerging from the relatively unconscious into reflective consciousness. And the reflective consciousness does its work best when it as nearly as possible carries on, in self-criticism and adjustment of purposes, the same moulding of the individual mental system, as part of a machine in which other mental systems correspond to it, as goes on unconsciously in the formation of the every-day practical will.

Is the view which I have suggested hostile to the theoretical study of social conditions? I should be very sorry if anything that I have said appeared to have such a tendency. But it is not a bad thing to bear in mind that all knowledge; whether practically or theoretically employed, is only real and vital when it is the extension of a process like that which I have been describing. Books cannot contain knowledge in a perfectly vital form; they are rather instruments or materials of knowledge than knowledge itself. In this science differs from fine art; poetry, for example, is destroyed if we destroy the particular form which it has in a book; but knowledge hardly exists for us till we have destroyed the form which it has in a book. It must be recast in the intelligence; that is, interpreted and criticised bit by bit till we have made it all of one tissue with our own vital experience—our experience of the matter in question in its most real form, whatever that may be, whether given in observation only, or in practice as well. When this is accomplished, and not before, the knowledge is really knowledge; that is, it is present as intelligence in our view of life or nature, and not as a recollection of something printed in a book. Such intelligence, however wide-reaching, always begins at home, both in social matter and in abstract science; there is always some point where we are more especially in contact with reality, and from which we extend our ideas by analogy. In all social matters this point is furnished by our own necessarily dominant ideas prescribed by our individual life. Therefore I say that all vital speculation is a process analogous to that which I have described as the formation of the general will, and speculation upon social matters is actually an extension of this process, ultimately

radiating from the same centre. The end of the whole inquiry is to understand life, and we are not likely to understand any other life until after we have understood that which is at our doors.

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THE COMBINATION OF CAPITAL.

It requires but little observation to assure one that the competitive system of industry is fast passing away. It is on every hand succumbing to trusts and other combinations for production and distribution. In agriculture, in some simple forms of manufacturing, and in retail trade, competition persists more or less perfectly, and bids fair to do so for a long time to come. But in almost every line of activity where combination is possible, and it is possible in nearly all, combination of some kind either already prevails or is in process of establishment.

Trade combinations are of various sorts. There are mere monopolies, where certain parties, few or numerous, sufficiently control the entire market to determine the prices at which wares are bought and sold. Then there are cases where different dealers, not closely bound together, have an understanding not to sell under such and such prices. Pools form a third variety of combination. Regular contracts to allow special rates in return for exclusive trade are a fourth. Corners, of the well-known sort, make a fifth. I mention as sixth a form of combination which is usually called a trust, but not very properly so. A small firm sells out to a larger one, receiving a lease in return, and perhaps also some stock. It then goes on in apparent independence, though really under the thumb of the purchasing party.

In the trust proper, or unincorporate trust, making a seventh class, several corporations place their stock in the hands of certain trustees, who, issuing trust certificates in return for such stock, so that the profits of the consolidated concern may be properly passed around, yet themselves, owning or at least